emotional coping

At its core, grief taps into our emotional selves. Our emotions can spiral into overdrive: they can fluctuate from day to day, hour to hour, and minute to minute. The following are coping tips that can help meet emotional needs.

Find a counselor: Talking about emotions can be extremely helpful. Finding a therapist can be a great way to help process the complex and painful emotions of grief. To find a grief counselor, you can be by calling your insurance company, EAP, local hospice, asking friends and family for suggestions, or doing a Google search.

Find a support group: Beyond talking to a counselor, there is benefit to connecting with other grievers. A support group allows you to meet others who may be going through something similar. To find a support group, call your local hospital, hospice, grief center or try a Google search.

Talk to a friend or family member: Finding a trusted friend or family member to share emotions and memories with can be an important part of grieving. Not all friends and family are good listeners, so consider who you feel most comfortable opening up to.

Write or journal: If talking isn’t your cup of tea, writing is a great alternative. It is a great way to process your emotions and also see and reflect on progress over time.

Read others’ grief experiences: Memoirs or blogs sharing other people’s experiences with grief can be helpful in processing emotions, while also serving as a reminder that there are commonalities in grief.

Cry: To some of you, this probably doesn’t sound like much of a tool! In fact, it might feel like something you can’t get under control. But for some people crying feels like something to be avoided at all cost, so they stuff those feelings away and avoid them. Working on feeling the painful emotions of grief and crying sometimes is an important part of grieving.

Learn your triggers: If you are feeling that your emotions are interfering with your everyday life, it is important to know what your grief triggers are. There will always be times tears creep in daily life, but knowing your triggers can help you be prepared and make it easier for you to manage those emotions.

Meditate: Grief can lead to emotions like sadness, anxiety, anger, fear, and yearning. If you suffer from racing thoughts and overwhelming emotions, learning breathing and meditation techniques can help with managing emotions.

rational coping

Though the idea of reason is often contrasted with emotion, rational coping can actually help us understand the emotions of grief. Knowing, understanding, and learning brings security and comfort. Some of the suggestions below are coping tools to meet the rational needs of grievers.

Learn about grief theory: Learning about different grief models can help with understanding the complex emotions of grief and provide ideas for coping.

Make plans for special days: Planning for the especially tough days—holics, anniversaries, and birthdays—can be difficult but helpful. It allows grievers to focus emotions and energy into creating something positive and manageable.

Focus on practicalities: Whether we like it or not, there are important, practical tasks that have to be addressed after a death. From planning the funeral to dealing with estates, belongings, bills, and insurance, rational-learners have many important opportunities to step in and assist with these and other concrete tasks. These are things that need to be done, and they also give rational grievers a sense of focus and purpose.

Analyze and self-reflect: The rational part of the brain loves to learn and understand. This includes learning and understanding ourselves. Self-reflection and formal therapy can be important ways for grievers to understand themselves and their grief.

creative coping

Creativity is a way to express the emotions we are feeling. From making art to appreciating art to looking for creative ways to honor and memorialize someone who died, creativity can be an important coping tool when grieving. Below are some ideas for creative grief coping.

Create art: It doesn’t matter what kind of art, and it doesn’t matter if you are “good” at art. It is about finding a type of art that resonates with you and using that art to express emotions and honor those you have lost. There are countless types of artistic expression, but some you may want to consider are:

- drawing
- writing
- photography
- sculpture
- collaging

Music: Whether it is listening to music, playing music, or writing music, music is an incredible tool in coping with loss. It allows you to express your feelings, connect with others, reduce your stress, and boost your mood.

Dance and movement: Dance can be a unique way to express emotions. Even if you don’t use dance or music for self-expression, dancing gets you moving and allows the brain to release chemicals that actually increase feel-good neurotransmitters.

Scrapbooking: Scrapbooks can be a great way to channel your creativity while also memorializing those you have lost.
coping.
The word sounds so simple, but coping with grief can be everything but. At a moment when you feel lost in a deep, dark hole, it seems impossible to imagine climbing out again. We wish there was an easy road map we could give you, but, alas, grief is far more complicated than that. People are all different, grief styles are different, and the tools that will work for one person may not work for another. In this short booklet we can only scratch the surface of the many ways there are to cope. The key is to find the tools that will work for you.

It's useful to have many coping strategies when dealing with the practical and emotional demands of grief. Though it would be impossible for us to list every coping tool here, hopefully these ideas have helped you to start thinking about an approach to coping that is tailored to your own strength, resources, and interests.

We have created a special page on the What's Your Grief website with more detailed information about grief and coping, including links to additional articles and resources about topics covered in this brochure. This can be found at www.whatsyourgrief.com/copingwithgrief

We are available at any time for questions. Please don't hesitate to contact us at whatsyourgrief@gmail.com
The thought of guiding an adolescent through grief without a map can be scary, but rest assured: you probably already have many of the tools you need to provide good grief support. In fact, one of the best things you can do for a teen is to simply be there for them in the following ways:

- Be present
- Be available
- Listen
- Talk openly and honestly
- Validate their emotions
- Understand that you can’t take away their pain
- Give them space when they want it
- Allow them to grieve in their own way
- Keep acting like a grown-up by drawing limits, providing guidance, and setting a positive example

We acknowledge that this guidance is broad and how it is specifically applied will depend on the adolescent and their unique situation. With that being said, we recommend you also take the following considerations into account when supporting a grieving teen.

This may be their first experience with...

- **End-of-life rituals and etiquette.** Many teens have yet to attend a funeral or memorial service. These rituals and the etiquette surrounding them may make adolescents anxious, especially if they don’t know what to expect or what to do.
- **Intense emotions.** For adolescents who have had little experience with hardship, this may be their first time experiencing some of the overwhelming emotions associated with grief.
- **Questions about the meaning of life.** Not all teens are ready to ponder life’s complex existential questions, but many are old enough to contemplate the “why” and “what for.”

Feelings of vulnerability

Most teens depend upon those in their support system to meet at least a few of their emotional and/or physical needs.

- **Loss of a parent or caregiver.** The death of a parent or caregiver can leave a huge hole in a teen’s life, regardless of whether the person who died was their gender role model, the parent they most relied upon, the disciplinarian, or the nurturer.
- **Physical instability and insecurity.** With the loss of a family member, a teen might worry about things like financial security, having to move, or having to go to a new school.
- **Adults’ emotional instability.** Following a death, grieving parents and caregivers may seem extremely emotional. They may not be able to care for the child’s needs or fulfill parental roles in the ways they have in the past.
- **Parental conflict or family estrangement.** Grief can strain relationships, even if the death only affects one or some of the people involved.

Grief for the future

Teens still have a life full of milestones and rituals ahead of them, like weddings, graduations, learning to drive, birthdays, and first jobs. It’s common for teens to grieve the fact that they can’t share these future rites of passage with their loved one.

Search for identity

A major task during adolescence is the search for identity. As with adults, grief can impact a teen’s identity during this critical time.

- **They are “the kid whose [insert relation] died.”** It’s common for a teen to be the only person in his or her peer group to have experienced the death of someone important.
- **They may have to take on new roles as a result of the death.** A grieving teen may find they have to take on new responsibilities, especially when their parent(s) are also grieving.
- **They can feel overshadowed by a sibling’s death.** Children who’ve experienced the death of a sibling may find themselves feeling overlooked, overshadowed, or compared.

Emotional expression

Teens may experience and express emotions differently than adults.

- **They may be embarrassed about their feelings.** Some adolescents just want to fit in and be “normal,” so they may be cautious about how and when they talk about their loss and express emotions.
- **Their expression of emotions may seem volatile.** Adolescents can change moods pretty quickly; one minute they’re happy and the next minute they’re miserable. To some degree, these shifts are due to increased hormones and their developing brains and bodies, but the extreme emotions of grief can cause mood swings in teens and adults alike.
They may seem self-focused. Adolescents in general can be very self-focused: Younger teens (12–14) have a particularly hard time taking other people’s point of view into account. So they may struggle to understand others’ reactions to grief when they are different from their own.

teens are invincible
(i.e. impulsive)

Generally speaking, teens are far more impulsive and willing to take risks than adults. Both teens and adults might use destructive coping mechanisms like alcohol, substance use, sex, antisocial behavior, and withdrawal, but teens are less like likely to fully consider the risks and use good judgment.

If you’re worried about how your child is coping, you may want to speak to their doctor, school counselor, or a child psychologist. If they ever express thoughts of harming themselves or others, you should call 911, go to your local emergency room, or call a local crisis response team. In the US, you can seek support 24/7 through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

what’s your grief?

for more information and links to online resources, visit:
whatsyourgrief.com/
supporting-a-grieving-teen
A child’s age has a large influence on how they understand and react to the death of a family member, friend, pet, or community member. Adults hoping to provide effective grief support for a bereaved child should consider where the child is likely to be developmentally. Although age can’t tell you exactly how a child will react, it can provide a context for how the child might view the loss.

As you read the following discussion on typical grief responses by age, please remember that every child is different.

With issues as complex as childhood grief, it’s difficult to have an umbrella large enough to capture everything that can be considered “normal.” This brochure should be used as a supplement to what you know about the child and his or her unique circumstances. Use your best judgment.

- They know how to express their feelings and emotions, although they may choose not to.
- They may be concerned with how others are reacting to the death and thus how they should react to the death.

12–20 years old

- They have a more adult perspective of death.
- Their mourning may look very similar to adults, although they still might be hesitant to express emotions.
- They are able to think abstractly about death and related concepts.
- They may try to make sense of things, philosophize, and search for meaning.
- They will continue to have regular adolescent interests and priorities, so allow the child to have fun and to engage in normal activities.
- They may be more comfortable talking about their grief with people outside their family. Grief camps and support groups may provide positive grief support.
- They may act out or engage in risky behavior.

If you’re worried about how your child is coping, you may want to speak to their doctor, school counselor, or a child psychologist.

what’s your grief?

for more information and links to online resources, visit: whatstyourgrief.com/supporting-a-grieving-child

supporting a grieving child
In addition to age, there are many other factors that could impact a child’s grief. These include maturity, past experience with death, socioeconomic status, social support, and relationship to the deceased. When supporting grieving children, we advise the following regardless of age or background:

- **Acknowledge the child** and validate the importance of his or her opinions, thoughts, and feelings.
- **Allow the child to grieve in his or her own way.** There is no “right” way to grieve, so don’t be surprised if their grief response differs from what you expected.
- **Be available.** Let the child know you will be there for them in the long term. If necessary, make sure they know how they can reach you.
- **Listen with the intent to understand.** Don’t attempt to minimize a child’s feelings or concerns, even if they seem trivial.
- **Answer the child’s questions** with honest age-appropriate responses.
- **Provide reassurance** that they will be taken care of and are safe.
- **Provide the child access to age-appropriate coping tools,** such as books, activities, grief support groups, and grief camps.
- **Include the child in family decisions** about the deceased, such as plans for funerals and special days.
- **Check in with other adults** involved in the child’s life, such as teachers, school counselors, faith leaders, and coaches.

## Grief Reactions by Age:

### 0–1 Year Old
- They do not have the ability to conceptualize death.
- Their memory capacity or a specific relationship is undeveloped. Unless the deceased was a close caregiver, they may have very little response.
- They may be aware that something is different or missing.

### 1–2 Years Old
- They do not understand the finality of death.
- They do not understand metaphors and euphemisms. Although it may feel callous to explain death in a direct and straightforward way, it is best to provide simple and clear explanations.
- If the child is verbal, they may ask about the person’s absence.
- If the person who died was an adult, it might be especially difficult for the child to understand that there are factors beyond their control that could take them away. Make sure to explain that the person did not choose to leave the child.
- They are able to sense the stress and emotions felt by grown-ups in their lives.
- They can get a sense of security, normalcy, and comfort from sticking to their normal routine as much as possible.

### 2–4 Years Old
- They don’t fully understand the finality of death.
- They might see the absence of the deceased as abandonment, so make sure to explain that the person did not choose to leave the child.
- They might see death as reversible or non-permanent, e.g., they may think the deceased can get better or wake up.
- They may ask the same questions over and over again.

### 4–9 Years Old
- They are starting to develop the ability to feel guilt. Guilt can be a confusing emotion, and they may feel guilty for odd things, including feelings and events related to the death.
- They may irrationally feel responsible for the death due to thoughts or wishes they had prior to the death (e.g., I’m responsible for the death because I told my mom I wished she would go away). Magical thinking is often seen around four years old. This is when the child feels their thoughts and wishes are responsible for the certain events happening around them.
- They may be interested in the process of dying and ask questions about how or why things happen.
- They are beginning to understand that death is not reversible or temporary.
- They may personify death as ghosts and monsters.
- They may lack the words to express their emotion, and feelings of grief and loss may come out as anger and frustration.
- They may need encouragement to express emotions through talk, play, or physical outlets.

### 9–12 Years Old
- They understand the finality of death and that everyone eventually dies.
- They are curious about the physical aspects of death.